

Old Bergen Church  
Bergen and Highland Avenues  
Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey

HABS-NJ-466

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Old Bergen Church  
Bergen and Highland Avenues  
Jersey City, Hudson County, New Jersey

Owner: The Minister, Elders, and Deacons of the Reformed  
Dutch Congregation of Bergen in New Jersey

Date of Erection: 1841

Architect:

Builder: William H. Kirk and Company, and Clark and  
Van Nest both of Newark

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: One with gallery and tower

Materials of Construction: Foundation - brownstone

Exterior walls - front and  
columns brick, stuccoed;  
rest of structure brown-  
stone

Interior walls - plaster

Inside chimney

Roof - pitch

Historical Data:

Old Bergen Church was the first church in New Jersey and the sixth congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. The date 1660 is the accepted one for the first church organization; this is the same year as the founding of the settlement of Bergen. However, the earliest record concerns the year 1662 when four

hundred and seventeen guilders (\$166.60) was raised by tax for the erection of the church. This record is in the Secretary of State's Office at Albany. Two years later it is recorded that there were nine male and eighteen female communicants of the church.

The first church, as far as we know, was a log structure. The exact location is uncertain, but it is surmised that it stood east of Bergen Avenue and Vroom Street. In 1680 a church of stone was erected costing two thousand six hundred and twelve guilders. It was octagonal to a point surmounted by a vane bearing a rooster. The bell ringer was in the center of the church. The pews around the wall were occupied by the men and the women occupied chairs in the center. The second building was erected in 1773 on the corner of Vroom and Bergen. It stood in the second cemetery.

In 1841 it was decided to build a new church, the present structure. For July 12, 1841, the church records contain the following entry:

"Resolved that the Old Parsonage be taken down to make room for the new Church Edifice and that the Building Committee use the materials to the best advantage they can."

The contracts were executed on July 22, 1841, and the cornerstone was laid August 26 of that year. The building committee according to the church records was Jacob D. Van Winkle, Gerrit Sip, and Abraham Vreeland. The Reverend Dr. Taylor, who was the dominie at the time of the building, describes the new structure as follows:

"The edifice, sixty-four feet in width, by eighty-four feet in depth, with a portico of ten feet in front, is of stone, excepting only the front and columns of the portico, which are of brick, coated with stucco. It is surmounted with a cupola of due proportions. The whole, suitably

ornamental and convenient. There are one hundred and forty-four pews on the floor, seventy-eight on the galleries - capable seating comfortably 1200 persons."

In the south elevation are to be found the corner-stones of the first and second church, plus that of the present one. The three stones are placed horizontally. The top one reads - "1680 W. Day". Day was the builder of the octagonal church; he was also one of the builders of the church at Hackensack (NJ-4). The second stone is inscribed - "Kerk Gebouwt In Her Yaer 1680 Her Bouwt in Het Yaer 1773" ("Church built in year 1680 This built in year 1773") and below that "& 1841". In 1882 an annex was added to the rear of the church.

Although the congregation was established in 1660-4, it was not until 1753 that a permanent minister was obtained. The Reverend William Jackson was, however, not installed until 1757. Since that date, the church has been served by six clergymen; the six are the Reverends Jackson, Cornelius, Taylor, Ammerman, Brett, and Clee.

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